

...IF THE UNIVERSE
STARTED WITH A BIG BANG,
WHO LIT THE FUSE?



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The INQUIRER

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From the Object passed at the General Assembly of the Unitarian and Free Christian Churches 2001

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Inquiring Words *Prayer for peace*

Let us open our hearts to prayer – to feel the dove of peace descend from the darkened skies; to know that a shaft of sunlight will pierce the storm clouds; to expect the rainbow to shine again – life's promise.

We have witnessed a war with its terrible destruction of the innocents and we pray for peace.

We think of those who sit on the ruins of their homes and their lives; families torn apart by bombs – and we pray for peace.

For all people whose lives are in the wilderness of despair where there is nowhere to go and no one comes to help; who sit in silence with hope their only comfort, we pray for peace.

For those who fear the coming of the darkness and those who fear the coming of light, we pray for peace.

Peace, be not empty; Peace, be not hopeless, be not loveless. Peace be the mystery and presence of the spirit of God. Be the firm arm around the broken; be the sure promise that all is not lost. That in the midst of nothing, something remains.

– The Rev Tony McNeile

Winter's Patchwork

Snow-melt
jewels the grass,
green amidst
the white and brown of
winter's patchwork mantle.
In the south
the reborn sun blazes.
A robin,
with glowing breast,
watches me from
his naked thicket.

White on White

A cold, grey day
With snow lying,
snow falling.
White on white,
an Egret rising;
a Barn Owl hunting
without breaking
winter's silence.
Across a snow-bound field,
a Roe Deer bounding.



– Cliff Reed

Fynn Valley, Suffolk, January 2010

Photo by Neville Kenyon

All aboard the Unitarian train

Sometimes, if we value truth, we just have to ask the awkward questions, says **John Pickering**. This doesn't always make us popular with those who tow the orthodox line.

Historically Unitarians have been independent thinkers, not bound by dogma, religious or scientific, and that in itself is worth a great deal as part of humanity's ongoing quest for truth. In one sense, whatever we may believe – or think we don't believe – all of us are essentially part of that same journey.

Let's stick with that train of thought for a while and see where it takes us.

Some years ago I had a dream in which I woke up on a rattling old train travelling through the Midwest during the American Civil War and after several adventures, I fell asleep on that train and woke up to find myself back in my bed at home.

For a few moments it was difficult to know which was real – the train or the bed?

It has occurred to me since that this dream provided an apt metaphor for human life. In one sense we all wake up to find ourselves with a one-way ticket on a train which we cannot get off, until it terminates at the last station we all know as death.

From the very moment we are born we move irrevocably forward through time. It's the most significant journey any of us will ever make.

Yet, strangely, most of the passengers on this train of life are more preoccupied with the interior design and on-board services than with the more important fact of their inexplicable passage on a train in the first place: a train which they cannot stop and with no idea of where they are going or why.

Some of us, not content with the platitudes and stock answers of our fellow passengers, have a few questions:

How did I get here? Who made the train? Where is it going? What is outside, beyond the interior we are all so familiar with? When we think of it in these terms it seems totally absurd that we should ignore the most vital questions of our existence.

"Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? Is death the end? Is this the only reality or is there something beyond?"

Theoretical physics essentially asks these very same questions: what was there before existence: how did a universe of Something come out of Nothing?

Philosophers too: What is it that we are and what is it that we are part of?

Orthodox science – a product of a train-bound mentality, nowadays exclusively preoccupied with the material fabric of the train – has no real answers.

Philosophy and religion, however, should ideally offer a wider perspective for enquiry.

Jesus said: "Seek and you will find." Most religions admonish us to seek for the truth but then once we join them – most

(Continued on next page)



If we value truth, sometimes we must ask the difficult questions.

Faith inspires work

Three years ago my wife Katie Hall and I joined the Kendal Unitarian Chapel and we attended the GA meetings for the first time last year. We met new people and made new friends, many of whom shared the same concerns about the future of Unitarianism that we did. This was particularly so in the meetings centred on Growth and Renewal. How can we increase as a movement and how can we make Unitarian principles better known to a wider public?

This train of thought had begun for us the year before when we realised that Unitarianism could appeal to many others, if only they knew about it.

As professional writers and designers we began to think about that and designed a set of postcards which reflected what we valued as Unitarians.

From that has since come a set of 12 proposed Wayside Pulpit designs.

One example of which is above, taken from our Ben's World comic strip. All the designs have been done with a view to making people more aware of Unitarian values and principles.

– John Pickering

We are on the brink of revolution

(Continued from previous page)

compel us to totally *stop* seeking – because wrapped in their doctrinal package is *The Complete Truth* – or so they think.

The refreshing thing about Unitarianism is that, in principle at least, it encourages people to participate in the quest for truth as individual spiritual beings: to discover for themselves the mystery and wonder of the universe of which we are all a part.

With that in mind, let's journey a little further on our train of thought:

In his article "*A dissenting view: why all the fuss about Darwin?*" in the August *Inquirer*, the Rev Bill Darlison, made some timely comments about the failure of science to answer the really important questions and the necessity for us, as spiritual beings, not to ignore the value of such questions.

I would further add that it is also important for us not to unthinkingly accept the stock answers trotted out by proponents of today's scientific orthodoxy.

By this I do not mean 'science' as a discipline for enquiry – that is a totally different matter. What I'm referring to here is the scientific orthodoxy which underpins today's materialistic paradigm. This is not science at all, but a mindset.

On our metaphorical train journey, scientific orthodoxy is totally preoccupied with materialism, with what it can see and touch and test within the fabric of the train.

The mass of population's common view of what constitutes reality has always been subject to the promotion of whatever viewpoint is considered acceptable to those in power at the time. For thousands of years the prevailing viewpoints have been driven by those with a religious ethos, but today we live in a secular society, driven by a materialistic view of reality, upheld by "science" (so called) which has replaced the old word of God as the final arbiter of all truth.

Scientific orthodoxy has become the big stick to beat down all opposition – very much like the old religious dogma of past eras. Anything not acceptable to the current materialistic mindset or not provable by scientific methods is considered delusional. How this came about is largely due to Darwin's theory of evolution, which provided the scientific basis that underpins modern materialism. Evolution has been unquestioningly accepted as a fact (when in fact it is still an unproven theory) by the majority of people in our secular society, very much as the infallibility of the Pope, or existence of purgatory were once unquestioningly accepted by vast numbers of people during the Middle Ages. It all seemed to make sense at the time.

The prevailing scientific and philosophical paradigm of our time can be summed up briefly as: *There is no God. All organised life as we know it is the result of completely random events: everything we are, and sense, are merely products of electro-chemical reactions.* Such a scientific perspective promotes a reductionist view of the human being. Worse, it is a viewpoint which has been foisted upon society, not because it is scientifically accurate or provable, but because it suits a materialistic world view. Small wonder that Darwinian evolution is the favoured viewpoint, it certainly provided scientific validation for tyrants like Hitler and Stalin.

As free-thinkers we must always question the prevailing viewpoint, particularly today, and especially as Unitarians, because the current materialistic paradigm and its pet, orthodox

Unitarians: building bridges not walls



One of John and Katie's Unitarian posters.

science, are destroying the balance of nature on our planet and undermining the value of the human spirit. Those orthodoxies have also tried to mislead us about the very nature of our existence. Newton, Darwin, even Einstein have been used to promote a materialistic agenda. Fortunately things are now changing radically.

We are on the brink of a Copernican-scale revolution in scientific thinking.

The last 20 years of discoveries in neurosciences, genetics and quantum physics reveal a universe and its fundamental processes vastly different to that proposed by Newton or Darwin.

Today's quantum physics describes a universe which has no material basis: a universe in which we can no longer view atoms and electrons as real solid entities with well defined physical properties, such as speed or position. In the quantum universe we now see that the fundamental forces which make up our material reality are not smaller bits of matter – there is no matter at all at the quantum level, only potentialities and probabilities: characteristics not associated to matter – but to thought!

Many scientists and researchers today talk of the "Intelligent Universe" a universe driven not by random mechanistic processes but by consciousness.

The work and experiments by Cleve Backster in biocommunication and Dr Masaru Emoto's studies of water – and others – have shown that thought influences matter. Perhaps

(Continued on next page)

Stop telling people they are wrong

By Phil Silk

I think the first principle for Unitarians (and many others) is agnosticism. We assume/recognise/accept that while we are 'life aware of itself', as Pascal put it, we are finite and unable to know the ultimate truth.

The second follows: each of us has the need and the ability to make personal sense out of our experiences, thoughts and emotions, influenced by our bodies and our culture – and ourselves.

It follows, therefore, that the Unitarian way requires not just 'tolerance', but respect for individuals, who are enquiring, interpreting and sharing their limited but valid understandings of Truth, especially of how to live a good life.

It is perhaps not surprising that this requires disciplined practice. How often have we found ourselves feeling very strongly that someone else's views, as expressed, seem wrong, not reasonable to us. Hard as it is, and I know it can be, we have agreed to encourage people to share their interpretations as clearly and convincingly as they can – with respect; better still, with appreciation. It is easy to stay silent, rather than possibly promote dissension, but then we deprive others by

railing to clarify the other person's views and failing to share our own, even in a local congregation, let alone nationally.

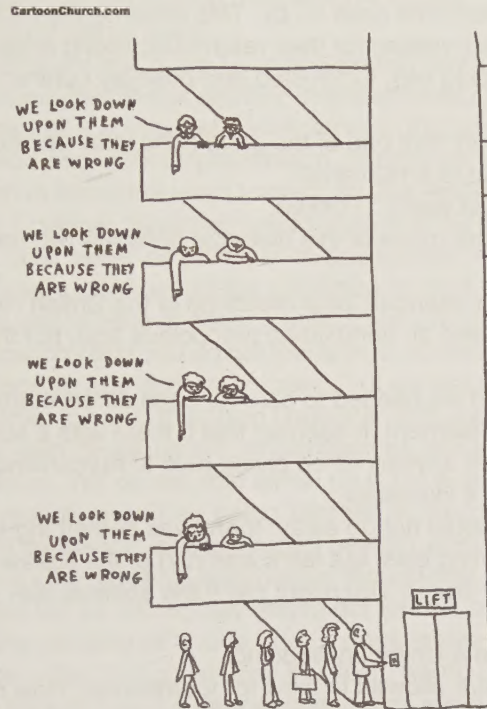
We cannot, however, live without making definite decisions, even if we know we do not understand reality fully. We have to do the best we can to understand and evaluate the situation at the moment which is where our faith comes in: given our

own reflections on the abundant life, we act as seems right to us. We know that other people can and do live well by following paths other than our own. Good luck to us all, I say, and let us continue to inquire and to share.

I am all in favour of people sharing their convictions, but I wish they would stop telling us that anyone who thinks otherwise is wrong, if not worse. But at least they care and we can learn from them and learn *in response* to them.

Perhaps in the future, I shall write in defence of a religious humanist view of life. Meanwhile, suffice it to say that, whatever the label, my reasoned and felt understanding of life does provide for worship, the celebration of life and rich and rewarding experiences. I know some agree, some don't. That does not matter. What matters is we keep exploring and sharing.

The Rev Phil Silk is a retired Unitarian minister.



Unitarianism is more relevant than ever

(Continued from previous page)

we shouldn't be too surprised by this if, as recent research indicates, a dynamic consciousness is endemic throughout creation. Theoretical physicist, Dr William A Tiller, actively proposes the view that paranormal and metaphysical events are expressions of a "reciprocal reality" generated within a universal consciousness.

Our train of thought has passed through the clunky, mechanical materialistic universe of Newton and Darwin and we now find ourselves in a dynamic cosmos underpinned by metaphysical immensities and mind staggering possibilities.

In this conscious quantum universe everything is connected.

This has even been documented at the physical level in many Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen paradox experiments in which two light particles deliberately separated by distance have continued to act as parts of a single reality – however far apart they are put. This in itself is an example of Oneness, not as an abstract concept but as a fundamental cosmic reality.

In terms of Unitarian beliefs, such developments provide a scientific rationale for the spiritual principle of Oneness and Unity. Even Big Bang theory, the belief that everything that now exists was once contained within the primordial atom, essentially implies the same view: a Unitarian view of Reality.

The old materialistic paradigm which has resulted in our consumer-driven society, has only served to divide humanity from the Earth: to divide human beings from each other and to

divide individuals from their spiritual nature.

Today, as a world and as a species we stand on the brink of a radical paradigm shift: a change of perspective on the universe around us. This will eventually impact on the lives of everyone on this planet – if we survive!

The recent fiasco at the Climate Summit in Copenhagen is a sure indication that world leaders need to realise that this one world which unites us is greater than all that divides us. Never more has our species needed to take hold of the concept of Oneness: One God, one world, one people.

Though we have touched briefly on issues on which more could be said, our train of thought has led us to our final destination: Oneness.

Unitarianism is more relevant today than ever before because at its heart is the concept of Unity, of Oneness, which resonates with the fundamental core of the cosmos. Unlike those beliefs based on unbending static dogma, Unitarian principles and values reflect the dynamic nature of the quantum universe.

When viewed from this perspective we can see that Unitarian values offer humanity a progressive spirituality which is worth promoting as a faith of choice for the 21st century.

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For more Ben cartoons get the RSPCA's Animal Action Magazine or visit: www.bens-world.co.uk You can also visit John and Katie's website at: www.lights2beyond.com

A Humanist struggles

By Larry Bode

I was 16. It was pouring down with rain. Still, the school insisted that we go on our weekly cross-country run, believing the activity was somehow good for us. I hated sports, being particularly inept at anything which involved spheres or moving legs more rapidly than was absolutely necessary. I was not alone. This foolish activity was becoming intolerable and needed to be addressed. So it was shortly after starting our run that a small group of us found shelter beneath a large tree and generously let the more energetic classmates pass us by. This became the pattern for many weeks and we spent the hours waiting for their return discussing religion – a more worthwhile exercise than getting wet, exhausted and possibly contracting some debilitating illness.

It was in the showers after one such 'run' that one of the gang (who later trained for the Anglican ministry) shouted out "You're a Humanist."

"What on earth is whatever you said just then?" I asked.

Goodness knows what the sports master made of this dialogue between two naked blokes in a shower.

I decided to investigate Humanism and attended local meetings of the British Humanist Association. I must have appeared an obnoxious, precocious brat, but they treated me well.

Yes, indeed I was a Humanist. I agreed we needed to care for each other; there was no need to involve a supernatural element. It seemed that if there was a supernatural 'being' it was not very consistent anyway when giving help to humankind.

And so for many years I was happy as a Humanist.

I had, though, a niggling thought that would not go away: there was something else going on. I could not define this something else, but felt it was part of the jigsaw puzzle that was the explanation for our being. You might call it the spiritual element.

Many years later I picked up a leaflet at a Unitarian wedding.

I was flabbergasted; these Unitarians are allowed to think for themselves. How refreshing – a religion where you can explore religious possibilities and come to your own conclusions.

This was intriguing and I started attending my local Unitarian chapel, fully expecting that I had misunderstood the information leaflet. But no! I was encouraged to explore all religious avenues. I am now proud to call myself a Unitarian.

However I am a very bad Unitarian as I find myself intolerant of many religions especially those that positively discourage deviation from the strict rules of their faiths. I am also suspicious of religions that concentrate on the lives and teachings of the founding leader to such an extent that the original purpose of the religion is lost.

I am also uncomfortable with so called sacred texts. Many have little relevance to today's conditions and discussions about their true meaning are rarely useful. I prefer secular readings.

In conclusion, I am a really bad Unitarian with religious humanist leanings but I am trying hard to improve. My views sound simple but I struggle to make sense of the human plight.

Larry Bode lives in Bramhall, Cheshire.

Something here for everyone

By Alistair Hamilton

I believe every time I see a rainbow after a storm – there is hope.

I believe every time I see a smile on a little one's face, there is joy.

I believe every time I see a snowdrop, spring is around the corner.

I believe every time I see a dog wag its tail or a cat purr, I see contentment.

I believe every time I see a couple holding hands, there is love.

I believe every time I sit in meditation, I find peace.

I believe that everyone who reads these words will find something to think about.

Finally, when the late Frankie Laine recorded his top seller 'I Believe', he did so because it didn't mention any specific religion. So, could this be a good Unitarian song?

Alistair Hamilton is a member of Mansfield Meeting House.

*This I Believe is
engaging people in writing,
and beliefs that*

this

Goddess i

By Jenny Watts

I believe that there is that of the Goddess in each of our unique journeys through life. Each spiritual path is taken – because that is the path – but what matters is how we live in the natural world. What matters is how we live. And the cycle of life, death and rebirth is the most natural thing in the world.

I believe these things: first, that the Goddess writ large is the sum of all that is. The Earth herself is also the Goddess. In some other place but are made of the Earth.

With climate change, we are facing a crisis. The Earth will survive without us, but in what condition. The lack of awareness prevalent in Western philosophy is a problem. I hope for the sake of all our children and will remedy our ways.

Jenny Watts is a member of Mansfield Meeting House.

Spiritualism supports faith

By Pete Markey

I am a Unitarian Spiritualist: or should that be Spiritualist Unitarian? Probably the latter, despite the fact that I discovered Unitarianism relatively recently, while I've been a spiritualist for a number of years. The truth is that the great majority of spiritualists I've met hold Unitarian views and beliefs, they simply do not realise it. Equally, few Unitarians realise that they might be only one step away from being spiritualists. That step; to accept that the light or spark of the divine which I believe is in all of us is, as immortal as the source from which it comes. That source I call The Great Spirit. We are Spirit with a body.

I've heard one of the Quaker fraternity say that Unitarians are Quakers with hymns. I suspect that this is another overstatement. Though it is interesting to point out that as part of a spiritualist divine service, the guest speaker is asked to stand and give an address without preparation, except for the inspiration from the higher realms, much in the same way Quakers do. It is the sharing of common beliefs and practices that, I believe, bind the human race. It is the imposition of beliefs that devastates us.

A core belief or principle of spiritualists is that we don't proselytise. To try and persuade someone of the existence of spirit through argument, for us, is wrong. We urge you to believe nothing unless you are given proof. We argue that you reject any philosophy that you do not feel is true, no matter its supposed source. We do not hold anyone to any dogma or creed, but accept people of any faith. Each human being reaches towards their own understanding and spiritual relationships in accordance to their own development, circumstances and needs. Each is responsible for their own conduct. We do ask that all we do is done in love and light. Sound familiar?

I regard myself as being blessed in having been given proof many times of our spirit existence; and privileged beyond words to have made connections with spirit. It is a very personal experience; though one echoed by countless others. It does not mean we do not equally grieve our losses, or live in denial of the death of the body, or the passing of a love one. It does mean our grief is tempered with comfort and hope – that though we lose the flesh, we do not lose the love. We *let go*, confident in the knowledge of a deeper connection when we need it.

We can relate to existence not as a series of tragedies and triumphs dictated by deity, but as a continuance of opportunities to learn and grow as beings of spirit. Spiritualists' beliefs negate the need for blame, and nullify spurious justifications for outrage. In the passing of spirit and in the light of the Great Spirit we all come together whatever our creeds. In Unitarianism we have an opportunity to come together just a little bit sooner.

Pete Markey is a member of Kidderminster Unitarian Church (The New Meeting House) and a member of The Beacon of Spirit, a spiritualist church also based at The New Meeting House.

Spirit in everybody. And that in matters is not which religious or any different paths to enlightenment towards each other and the rest of we, tolerance and compassion. embraced, not feared. It is the

that of Goddess in everybody, man endeavours. Second, that be. And heaven and hell are not experienced by humans here on

greatest challenge of our generation is will humanity survive Mother Earth, which has been for so long, is coming home to at we have at last learnt our les-

Unitarian Earth Spirit Network.

Contribute to 'This I Believe'

Write and submit your own statement of personal belief.

Tell a story

Be specific

Be brief: 300-500 words

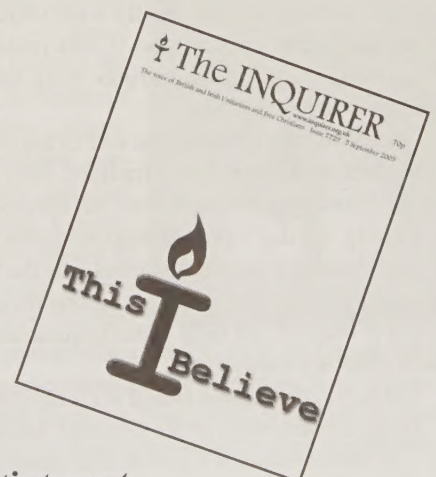
Name your belief

Be positive

Be personal

For more tips see: <http://thisibelieve.org/>

Send contributions to Inquirer@btinternet.com, or to the postal address on page 2.



Inter Faith, the Lambeth way

By Jeffrey Lane Gould

It was with a great sense of pride and anticipation that I accepted an invitation from the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, to represent the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Churches at a special function held at Lambeth Palace on 16 November to launch Inter Faith Week. It's an Inter Faith Network initiative which provides faith communities with a range of local, regional and national opportunities to demonstrate their work together and to highlight the major contributions that religious faith makes to society. The Faith and Public Issues Commission of the General Assembly is able to send representatives to attend the meetings of the network, and I was asked in my role as chair of the commission to take part in the launch of the special November week.

Those who attended the launch, including Dr Indarjit Singh, the Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, as well as leaders of many other faith communities. All present signed a statement of commitment to continue building good inter-religious relations and to contribute to the common good from different religious perspectives. The Secretary of State, John Denham, also attended the event, and was warmly welcomed by those present. He had hosted a similar event in the preceding week, in order to affirm the government's support of the inter-faith initiative.

The last time I had seen Rowan Williams was the occasion of my final tutorial with him whilst I was a student at Oxford University, in June of 1989. It was a pleasure to speak with him and convey the greetings of the General Assembly. To his credit, the archbishop remembered who I was, and offered warm good wishes to Unitarians and Free Christians. The assembly room of the palace looked as if it were filled with the cast of Radio 4's 'Thought for the Day,' as so many different religious leaders were present. I was initially apprehensive about attending the event on my own, but was quickly joined by the representative of the Society of Friends (the Quakers), and the Director of the Christian-Muslim Forum, who was very knowledgeable about the General Assembly, and inquired about the recent marriage of the Revs Jean McNeile and Alex Bradley!

It was good to meet so many different religious figures, some famous, some less well-known. The food and beverages on offer represented an equally wide variety of cultures, traditions and dietary codes, and it was remarkable for an inter-faith event that alcoholic drinks were served alongside fruit juices and bottled water.

On leaving the palace at the end of the event, I was joined by a Muslim gentleman from Bradford, who was eager to tell me of the Unitarians he knew from his own community.

Clearly, the day's proceedings achieved many things, but the most substantial accomplishment was the bringing together of so many people who valued religious diversity, and who were eager to become not only better acquainted, but more aware of each other's perspectives.

The Rev Jeffrey Lane Gould is chair of the Faith and Public Issues Commission of the General Assembly and is minister at Bury Unitarian Church. For more information on Inter Faith Week, including a video of the launch and statements from denominational leaders, see:
www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/2613



Leaders from many faiths gathered at Lambeth Palace, including Jeffrey Lane Gould (first row standing, fourth from right.) Photo courtesy of Lambeth Palace.

Statement signed by faith leaders present at Lambeth Palace to launch Inter-Faith week:

We believe that good inter faith relations are a vital part of a harmonious, just and respectful society.

We pledge, today, to deepen our work to increase understanding about and between our faiths and to strengthen our cooperation on social issues.

We renew our commitment to developing effective and long term ways of dialogue and mutual learning. We shall continue to seek to understand the patterns of engagement of our faith communities – through history and today; to affirm the positive aspects of these patterns; and to heal wounds of misunderstanding where these are found.

While our great religious traditions are distinct in belief and practice, there is much that unites us. We will draw on fundamental values held in common and on the wisdom of our respective faith traditions to continue to work - as individual communities and together - for the wellbeing of our society, our wider global community and the planet that is our home.

Alongside all of good will, we will work to tackle with renewed determination the challenges of poverty, ignorance, injustice, crime and violence, and social fragmentation and to help shape a society where all feel at home; all are valued and justly treated; and all have a chance to thrive.

Queen Elizabeth's Inter Faith statement:

The Most Reverend and Right Honourable the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, Lambeth Palace.

I was pleased to learn about the reception for the leaders of Britain's main religions, which is being held at Lambeth Palace at the beginning of Inter Faith Week. I read with interest the proposed resolution which will be signed by all those who are present.

Britain's faith communities are to be admired for the important contribution that they make to our society and I share your hope that this statement of commitment and unity will reinforce the Millennium resolution drafted nearly ten years ago. Please convey my best wishes to all concerned for a most memorable and successful event.

ELIZABETH R.

16 November

York welcomes a new leader

By Margaret Hill

Members and friends gathered at the York Unitarian Chapel in St Saviourgate on 5 December for the induction of Myrna Michell to her ministry with York Unitarians.

The service was conducted by the Rev Gillian Peel (of Rochdale), members of the congregation participated in chalice lighting and readings, and the hymns were from *Sing Your Faith*. A shared covenant was made between the chapel community and the minister. The address was given by the Rev John Midgley, Myrna's former mentor, who reminded those



On Sunday 6 December, the General Assembly President, the Rev Bob Wightman, lead worship in the York Unitarian Chapel in St Saviourgate, taking as his theme "Growth and Communication within the Denomination". Prior to the service he was a guest on Julia Booth's Sunday Breakfast programme on Radio York. Bob is truly a professional broadcaster and managed to slip in a reading from the American Unitarian book "Rejoice together". Julia described him as the "top dog" in the British Unitarian movement. They went on to discuss topical items from the Sunday newspapers.

Lydgate Chapel chair died unexpectedly

We at Lydgate Chapel have been hit by a tragedy. Our chairman of the congregation, Clifford Lord, has died aged 74. He had been suffering from heart problems for a while, and went into hospital for a heart-bypass operation. He was very ill after the operation, but seemed to be recovering. However, he had a heart attack, and died in November.

His funeral service took place at Huddersfield Crematorium on 1 December. The place was packed, literally standing room only. A sign of his impact on local society, as ambulance worker, local historian, Probus member and President, and tireless worker for our chapel.

He was very well liked and will be greatly missed. Our sympathies go to his widow Barbara, children, grand children and great grandchildren.

— Raymond Vickers



The Rev Gillian Peel of Rochdale conducted the induction service for Myrna Michell at York Unitarian Chapel in St Saviourgate. Photos by John Hewerdine.

present that 25 years ago the congregation had reduced to just four or five members, who wondered how they could keep going in their historic church. However when the Rev Sydney Knight retired to live in York, he took on the chapel as a retirement project and slowly the membership increased, then followed the Rev Margaret Kirk, who nurtured the congregation and it grew. The signs for Myrna Michell's ministry are good, and York Unitarians should look optimistically to the future.

Greetings were given from the General Assembly by the Rev Bob Wightman, President of the General Assembly, by David Arthur, President of the Yorkshire Unitarian Union, and by Shirley Fieldhouse of the Cambridge Unitarian Church where Myrna had formerly been a member.

Myrna was invited to 'take the pulpit', and ended the service with the final hymn and closing words. A retiring collection was made for the *Send A Child to Hucklow Fund*.

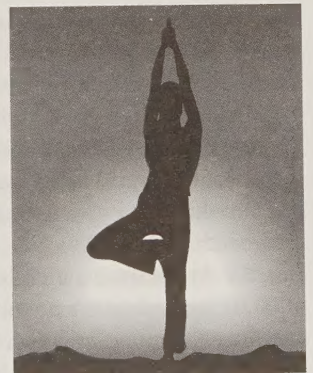
Margaret Hill is a member of York Unitarians.

Yoga retreat planned

Registration is still open for a Yoga Retreat planned for the weekend of February 5–7. Sponsored by the London District, the retreat will be held at Southend Unitarian Church. Gary Leggett, a member of the Southend congregation, is a highly qualified and experienced yoga teacher, and he has generously offered to lead the retreat for yoga practitioners of all levels. Very favourable rates have been procured at a nearby hotel, and in addition to yoga there will be opportunities for free time, worship, socialising, and exploring the town. The retreat is open to anyone in the denomination or members of the local yoga community of Southend and environs.

Contact David Usher now to reserve your place. Email: davidusher@ldpa.org.uk or phone (01732) 465248

Illustration by Michael Lorenzo



Letters to the Editor

Thank God for Unitarian unpopularity

To the Editor:

As a lifelong Unitarian and pacifist, I take exception to what I perceive to be the subtext of David Morgan's review of the National Gallery's exhibit: 'The Sacred Made Real' (*The Inquirer*, 14 November). The quotation by Geoffrey Hill which opens the review: '... And by Christ's blood are men made free', together with the outmoded allusion to a Unitarian view of Jesus as the gentle white-robed character of Nazareth contrasted with the blood-stained Man of Sorrows are employed to suggest that we religious liberals will never have the majority support which Evangelicals currently enjoy. Thank God I say!

Incidentally, Caliban (In Shakespeare's 'The Tempest') is much closer to my understanding of humanity than the magician (and control freak) Prospero.

Peter Sampson

Cross Street Chapel
Manchester

Appoint a group to promote growth

To the Editor:

The price of *The Inquirer* has gone up by 14%. The GA has undergone a loss of £20,000. At the present it is not too outrageous to predict a continuation of this financial situation. To avoid this we need more money. To pre-empt the discussion regarding fundraising at GA 2010, I make the following comments. To my recollection the denomination has never been self sufficient in live giving. We have always had to rely on investment income. There is no reason to believe that live giving will increase. To avoid another £20,000 deficit there would have to be an increase of £5 in the quota – assuming a total membership of 4000.

But, we do not have a membership of 4000. If we look at the quota payments and the corresponding quota figure, we come up with a quota paying membership of: 3952 for 2005, 3754 for 2006, 3711 for 2007 and 3642 for 2008, a decline of 310 over the last four-year period. A continuation of this decline will result in even fewer buyers of *The Inquirer*, and in order to stay afloat, a continuing increase in its cost.

Similarly with quota payments – fewer members means more financial demands on the remaining members. Remembering too that with fewer members of congregations, remaining members will have to dig deeper into their pockets, there can only be one solution to our problem – we must seek more members.

Over the past 31/2 years we have seen attempts to encourage numerical growth within our congregations, but, bearing in mind the decline in membership, they have not met with success. Or perhaps they have in some places, for these figures do not identify individual congregations. We need to know.

So:

1. How many congregations have grown in the last 4 years?
2. Which are they?

3. What policies did these congregations put into operation to achieve Numerical Growth?
4. How many inquiries were made because of these policies?
5. How many people came?
6. How many people stayed?
7. How many people became members?
8. What, specifically, attracted those who became members?

All these and perhaps more questions will help congregations that are not growing numerically. However, to gather and distribute this information will take the efforts of more than one person. If a group can be appointed with the remit of monitoring and encouraging numerical growth within the denomination, it would go some way towards fulfilling the aims of the GA Resolution of 2006.

Peter Whitham

Stockton

Torquay Church Building Appeal

To the Editor:

Our church is situated at the foot of a cliff face, receiving the full force of maritime weather, and we urgently need help to make the building withstand the elements.

Although we have been able to deal with smaller repairs and renovations, a recent structural survey has highlighted several areas which need urgent attention: the roof needs to be replaced with new

underlay, slates and nails; the front walls of church and the tower need to be completely re-pointed and some of the stonework needs to be repaired. Some of the front leaded windows are bowing and need to be re-set.

The church is an attractive Grade II listed building built in 1912. Sir Nikolaus Pevsner seemed to like it, describing it as 'a diminutive limestone cathedral for liberal Christianity. Quirky Perpendicular, gabled and buttressed with tower porch.'

We are a small congregation with very limited funds, but our church is also used by another larger group for worship.

We have made a commitment to keep our place of worship in good condition for future Unitarians in South Devon. We are doing everything we can to raise the money, including applying to English Heritage, but we currently still need to raise £18,400 for this urgent repair work.

Any help you can give us would be most appreciated. If you can contribute, please make your cheque out to 'Torquay Unitarian Church' and send to our Treasurer Terry Jones at Sunny Mount Cottage, Lustleigh, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ13 9TD.

Thank you.

Yours in fellowship

Andrew Lacey

Secretary, Torquay Unitarian Church



Torquay Unitarian Church

Wales is Unitarians' 'Good Ground'

J. Eric Jones *The Good Ground: Unitarian Places of Worship in Wales* (Aberdare, 2009) £5.00; *Gardens of Faith: Unitarian Heritage Sites in Wales/ Gerddi Ffydd: Safleodd Hanesyddol Undodaidd yng Nghymru* (Unitarian Welsh Department, Aberdare, 2006) £5.00

Review by Andrew M Hill

The Good Ground is an attractively produced pamphlet about the "22 [Unitarian] worship centres in South Wales" 13 in the Black Spot of Ceredigion (Cardiganshire), eight in Glamorgan and one (a new or renewed one, it seems in Carmarthen). In addition in North Wales there is a "newly established Unitarian group in Bangor". The maths is a bit puzzling since there are brief accounts and attractive pictures of just 21 centres plus a page on "training for the Unitarian ministry". The coloured pictures are delightful, chapel insides and outsides, pipe organs and electronic, pulpits, windows, clocks, lamp fittings, tea cups, noticeboards, a book case, a miners' lamp, a hymn number board (33, 182, 8, 214), a sol-fa modulator, grave stones and memorial plaques. Each centre has a brief description with the balance, perhaps a little over much 'then' rather than 'now'.

An earlier companion volume by Eric Jones *Gardens of Faith* makes a very helpful and useful guide to former 'then' Welsh Unitarian sites and places of interest. Apart from the cover, this guide's pictures are all black and white. Former chapels and places of interest like Unitarian farms are often more easily found according to river valley than by administrative region. Also provided are instructions on how to find, either on foot, by bicycle or in a motor car all these historic places; but in *The Good Ground* locations are reduced to post

codes so a motor car and SatNav are essential to find them!

Much of the source material for the Welsh Unitarian heritage is inaccessible to English monoglots so both of Eric's pamphlets are extremely helpful and useful. So are the up-to-date bibliographies. *The Dictionary of Welsh Biography* (in English and now on-line at the National Library of Wales) would have been a useful and reliable addition. On the other hand the publishing information is scant and neither has an ISBN number. They cost £5 each but where from is anyone's guess. Amazon doesn't have them. Kay Millard's *How to Publish Your Work* (Lindsey Press 1998) £3.50 is recommended to all Unitarian self-publishers.

One other grouse, and it's not just about these pamphlets. Why do we publish pictures of our places of worship with closed doors and without any of the people who make them living churches? Two, back-to-the camera people in Cribyn's graveyard and a rescued Wesleyan "good shepherd" stained glass window at Cefn Coed, appear to be the only "living stones" planted in *The Good Ground*. On the other hand in *Gardens of Faith* there are four (presumed deceased) living stones, and about 40 at Llanmadog Youth Camp in 1966 all hopefully still flowering.

But with grouses out of the way these are helpful and useful guides for those who the pilgrimage to Unitarian Wales. I recommend them and had already found *Gardens of Faith* useful in my own research. Long may Welsh Unitarians and their chapels flourish and flower with living churches!

The Rev Andrew M. Hill is a retired Unitarian minister.

(To answer Andrew's question, both books are available from J. Eric Jones, at 14 Clifton Street, Aberdare, CF44 7PB or email: eric.ann.jones@gmail.com – ed.)

Letters

Department of Ministry is essential

To the Editor:

I appreciate that comments from voices from the past are not always welcome or appropriate, but I must write to support wholeheartedly the open letter (*Inquirer*, 9 January) from ministers and students for the ministry.

When I was GA General Secretary (from 1979 to 1994) the largest, most important and essential part of my work was supporting and serving our ministers and congregations. Apart from processing criminal background checks (unheard of in my days!) I was responsible for all of the "tasks" listed in the ministers' letter and more. It was a real privilege for me to try to exercise a ministry to ministers and congregations for 15 years.

I remember that, during this time, the Ministerial Fellowship wanted a Department of Ministry to be established and I objected to it (perhaps selfishly) on the grounds that this

would rob me of the largest and most satisfying part of my job.

However, clearly times have changed, and, if support for ministry and congregations is not deemed to be central to the work of our General Assembly and is not to be a significant part of our Chief Officer's brief, I believe that we surely need a dedicated Department or Director of Ministry and Congregational Support – and manifestly a commitment of more than one or two days per week is essential. Our future does indeed depend on such a commitment. We must not say that we cannot afford it – we have to afford it!

I would like to add best wishes to Derek McAuley; I am sure he will be an excellent Chief Officer and, I agree Colleen, he needs our support and encouragement.

Dr Roy Smith

GA Honorary Member, past GA General Secretary, and currently Lay Leader of Tenterden Unitarians

The Inquirer is off to a great 2010 start

To the Editor:

What a wonderful first edition of *The Inquirer* for 2010. The smiling picture of our new chief officer followed by the rallying call for showing the way forward by the Rev Dr Linda Hart with 'Inquiring Words' and for our Editor's View.

I felt really motivated and stirred by the challenging words and the taking on board of the importance to move the movement forward with love and understanding. To give the New Chief Officer all the support we can give. Well done Colleen – a true editor who is not afraid to say what she feels from deep inside her Unitarian heart.

Carol Chilton

Norwich

Big plans for young people at the GA

By John Harley

The theme for this year's Annual Meetings at Nottingham is YOUTH, so this year promises to be an extra special one full of exciting goodies. Activities to look out for.....

Youth Pre-Con - 6-8 April at the Nightingale Centre. Two days of workshops for any 12-17 year olds who are booked in for the Youth Programme at Nottingham. This Pre-Con is free and will offer opportunities to create the opening worship at the Annual Meetings. For further details see the Unitarian website or for specific questions contact Sarah Warhurst at littemissbossy@hotmail.com.

Samba Drumming Workshop for 7-17 year olds—Thursday 8 April – Nottingham – 2.30-4.30pm – with John Hartshorn. For all those booked in for first day of the Annual Meetings.

Youth Roadshow –Saturday 10th April at 11am to 4.30pm – for 7-11 year olds. A free Jamboree-style day of games, activities and fun. We will be inviting up to 150 children to Nottingham for the day to take part in a Roadshow of games and activities. They will travel to Nottingham on coaches sponsored by the DSC, one coach making stops at Liverpool/Stand and Dukinfield, another from London and the third calling at Cardiff and Birmingham. Churches with children are requested to contact Vanessa to get places on coaches allocated as soon as possible. Children will need to bring 2 packed lunches, a supervising adult (per group) and £5 which includes all travel and activities.

We hope that as many young people as possible will take up this opportunity and further details can be found in the in-



A worship service conducted by some of the young people at the 2009 General Assembly.

formation packs recently sent from Essex Hall or by emailing Vanessa Rothwell co-ordinator for the event on vanessaandstephen@yahoo.co.uk

Also, we'll be running our Youth Programme at the Annual Meetings for Juniors and Seniors as usual.

Do contact me at jharley@unitarian.org.uk if you have any further questions about these events. We are looking forward to a bumper year of fun.

All Unitarian events, including youth activities can be found seen at: www.unitarian.org.uk/events where you will find links information and booking forms.

The Rev John Harley is Youth Coordinator for the General Assembly. Vanessa Rothwell contributed to this article.

Hucklow Summer School 2010

For Personal and Leadership Development

SPEAKING OF GOD

Unitarian Adventures in Theology



21st to 28th August 2010
Great Hucklow, Derbyshire

Applications due by 1st April 2010

Hucklow Summer School Panel: part of the Education and Training Commission,
The GA of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, Registered Charity: No. 250788.

The core purpose of Hucklow Summer School is religious education: we focus on matters of religion and spirituality and intend to draw out and develop the potential of all participants. We aim to provide a balanced programme, offering a rich mix of activities for both the heart and head, and a variety of optional sessions showcasing a range of worthwhile activities which participants might "take home" and try out in their own congregations and communities. We also ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for relaxed fellowship and fun during the week. Summer School brings fellow Unitarians together and allows them to get to know each other deeply and form lasting connections.

Theme Talks: "Speaking of God"

with Dr. Mel Prideaux and Friends

A Choice of Morning Engagement Groups:

"Experiencing God"

with Rev. Margaret Kirk and Winnie Gordon

"Exploring Prayer"

with Dr. Jane Blackal and Dr. Mel Prideaux

"Icons: Windows to the Divine"

with Rev. Linda Hart and Caroline Blair

"Building Your Own Theology"

with Joyce Ashworth and Rev. Maud Robinson

Children's Programme

with Peter Teets and Jim Blair

Basic Cost for Adults (shared room): £340

Some bursaries are available to help with the cost of attending.

Please visit our website for further details and an application form:

www.hucklowsummerschool.org.uk

Alternatively, please telephone Mel Prideaux, on 01924 781 020